

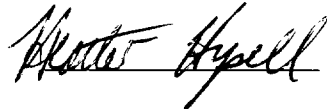
Religiosity On a Mid-Sized, Mid-American Campus

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Heather Hysell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.

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Abstract

Background Information

I wanted to determine the impact religion has on the average mid-western American college student. To determine this value I surveyed 200 Ball State University students in the realms of their religious beliefs and use of time. My study focused on how the students describe their faith currently, the differences and similarities between the students' lifestyles and their professed religions, and students' thoughts on their change in activities and/or faith as they settle down into a career or with a family. To get a more in depth look into the lives of these college students I then asked 20 of the 200 students to complete a supplementary survey which questioned the reasoning behind their original survey answers.

Several studies indicate that the people of our nation consider themselves religious. A report that came out in 1988 as a result of a Gallup poll claimed that only eight percent of Americans did not profess a religious preference. In another survey, 61 percent of Americans put a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in organized religion (Reeves 16). The results of a study conducted by Goldhaber Research Associations reveal that 90.7 percent of those surveyed profess a religion while only 7.6 percent reported no religion (Bergman 34). Diane Winston from the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University states that spirituality, "the more popular term" for religion, is thriving not only in the country as a whole, but especially among undergraduates (A60).

Webster has defined religion in several ways. Accordingly, his first definition of religion is that it is a "belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshiped as the creator(s) and ruler(s) of the universe," then he went on to state that it included the expression of such a belief through conduct or ritual. The next two definitions Webster provided emphasized religion as a system of belief, suggesting that it demanded adherence to a code of living (1134). Michael Leiber and Anne Woodrick wrote religion gives individuals meaningful explanations for their experiences and standards for assessing one's own behavior against that of others (496). Furthermore, Echo-Hawk "religion represents a rich resource in the moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind" (20).

As demonstrated by several studies, the majority of Americans believe in a personal God. In the poll conducted by Professor Goldhaber of the State University of New York, 88.6 percent agreed with the statement "There is a personal God who can answer prayer;" only 8.2 percent

disagreed with the statement (Bergman 34). Eighty-four percent of those in a Gallup poll said that Jesus was God or the Son of God, even 72 percent of the unchurched believed this identification. In 1990 a poll of 113,000 Americans scattered over the United States found that only 7.5 percent of those surveyed said they had no religion, while 86.5 percent claimed they were Christians. Moreover, a 1991 Gallup poll revealed that about 70 percent of adults are members of a church or synagogue. Among teens, 86 percent believed that Jesus Christ is God or the Son of God and 73 percent considered regular church attendance an important part of American citizenship (Reeves 16). Finally, a vast majority, 96.4 percent, of those claiming to be Protestant agreed there is a personal God who answers prayer, a percent much larger than all other groups (Bergman 34). Furthermore, a survey of 4,809 Americans in September 1994 by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press found that nearly eight out of ten claimed prayer to be an important part of their daily life (Reeves 17).

Though age, marital status, and race do not have a statistically significant impact on these results, education does influence the rate of agreement or disagreement, but only at the two extremes. Individuals with a high school diploma or less are slightly more likely than the average person to agree that there is a personal God who answers prayer while those with a graduate or professional degree are significantly less likely to agree (Bergman 34). In Goldhaber's study, 30.6 percent of Americans with a high school education or less agree that evolution is the best explanation of human existence. This rate of agreement steadily rises to a rate of 54.0 percent among those with a graduate or professional degree (Bergman 36).

Goldhaber's study asked individuals to classify themselves as either very religious, somewhat religious, or neither religious nor non-religious. Greater than 90 percent of Protestants

and Catholics described themselves as somewhat or very religious while only 51.4 percent of people from all other beliefs combined described themselves in the same way. Seventy-nine percent of individuals between 18 and 24 years call themselves religious; a rate which gradually rises to 89.9 percent for those 65 years or older (Bergman 38).

According to Reeves, 43 percent of the public claim to depend upon their personal experience instead of outside sources, such as religious norms or church rules, when determining issues of right and wrong. Reeves also found that in matters of truth, only three persons in ten view Scripture as the supreme authority (18). Religion, if sincere, should affect a person's attitudes and activities. Based on a 1989 survey of religious beliefs and practices among psychiatric patients, Kroll and Sheehan concluded that religion plays an important role in the lives of most patients (71). As an example, in a study conducted by Michael Lieber and Anne Woodrick it was found that religious beliefs, especially a literal interpretation of the Bible, were positively correlated with racial and gender stereotyping and with punitiveness (497). Neeleman and Lewis wrote that religion explains two to six percent of the variance in subjective well-being while 58 percent of the variance related to "socializing religious activity" such as church attendance (125). Religious orientation is positively correlated with well-being and protects against depression (132). Due to the better social integration of church-goers (Dublin 74), completed suicide is less likely in frequent church attenders (Comstock & Partridge 669). In the general population, the thought of suicide is negatively correlated with frequency of prayer, church attendance and religious affiliation. Furthermore, those with high religiosity do not accept suicide as a possible way out (Hoelter 170).

According to Grasmick and McGill (1994), Christian beliefs augment an attributional

style that emphasizes dispositional characteristics because Christianity stresses individual character and accountability (28). These authors also found that those who hold to a literal interpretation of the Bible are most likely to attribute behaviors to individual choice and, thus, to favor punitive and retributive punishments (25). In the study conducted by Lieber and Woodrick, Biblical literalness and salience scales were positively correlated as was Biblical literalness with the attributional style of blaming the person (501-02). However, a fundamental view of the Bible did not have a statistically significant impact on attitudes toward punishment (Lieber & Woodrick 504). Walter Echo-Hawk wrote that religion is a cornerstone for rehabilitation (20).

In summary, secularization does not paint an accurate picture of our society. Diane Winston poses that "diffusion" could provide a better depiction, indicating "the scattering of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors." Winston further describes this phenomenon by illustrating that today's young people are following in past patterns in searching for exotic ways of believing and behaving in their explorations for richer, more meaningful ways of existing in this world (1998). This believing and behaving upholds Webster's definition of religion; it is belief in a higher power as well as an expression of this belief in conduct. Many believe in a personal God as described Biblically and 80 percent express this through prayer and in their basis of right and wrong. Also, the previous statistics reveal that religion in America is valued, especially among those with less education and older generations, and can affect a person's lifestyle.

Methods

In order to gather the information I needed, I developed the following brief survey entitled the "Gettin' Deep" survey.

First Name:

Phone # (optional):

1. Would you describe yourself as a religious person?

Yes

No

2. How often do you pray?

☐ More than once a day

☐ Once a day

☐ Once a week

☐ Once a month

☐ Once a year

☐ Never

3. How much does your faith affect your daily thinking, actions, and decisions?

Percentage

0-10-20-30-40-50-60-70-80-90-100

4. Do you think religion should influence your (daily) life?

Yes

No

5. What types of activities/organizations are you involved in? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Athletic

☐ Academic

☐ Cultural

☐ Drama

☐ Environmental

☐ Musical

☐ Religious

☐ Greek

☐ Other _____

6. Do you profess one of the following faiths?

☐ Buddhism

☐ Christianity

☐ Hindu

☐ Islam

☐ Judaism

☐ Mormonism

☐ Other _____

7. Do you think your faith will increase as you settle down/get a family?

Yes

No

8. Do you think your activities will change significantly as you settle down/get a family?

Yes

No

I wanted to get a good sampling of Ball State's student population so I surveyed 200 students in Health Science classes. This class is a general studies requirement; therefore, it has a mixture of ages, cultural backgrounds and personal interests. I then contacted 20 of the people that wrote their phone number on the survey to ask if they would be willing to do a follow-up survey which asked specific questions as to their reasoning for their answers on the initial survey.

The questions on this "Gettin' Deeper" survey were as follows:

1. Why do you describe yourself as a religious/non-religious person?
2. What motivates you to pray or not to pray?
3. In what ways does your faith affect your daily thinking, actions, and decisions?
4. Why do you think religion should or should not influence your daily life?
5. What do you think about when you are walking to class, driving, or any other time when your mind is not engaged in an activity?
6. How do you think your faith will change/increase as you settle down?
7. How do you think your activities will change as you settle down?

I gave the students their first surveys to refer to while answering the follow-up survey. Upon receiving the completed surveys, I began to compile the results.

Results

The results of this study are many, however, for this paper they will be limited to three general categories. The first set of results will reveal how those surveyed currently describe their faith while the second set will compare/contrast what the students are involved in to whether or not they incorporate religion into their lives. Finally, the last discussion will focus on students' thoughts on their change in activities and/or faith as they settle down into a career or have a family.

The data collected supports previous studies of many claiming to be religious. Of the 200 students surveyed, 61 percent call themselves religious, which compares to Goldhaber's study of 79 percent of individuals between 18 and 24 years of age; the difference possibly due to the amount of education. Moreover, only 14 percent pray more than once a day; this should be surprising as Goldhaber's study revealed that less than ten percent (8.2) do not believe in a personal God who can answer prayer. A mere 2.5 percent claims their faith affects 100 percent of their thoughts, actions, and decisions. The majority of people, that is 31.5 percent, pray once a day. Only 34 percent pray once a day or more which sharply contrasts to the Times Mirror survey which found that 80 percent considered prayer to be an important part of daily life. Meanwhile, 40.2 percent believe that their faith affects more than 50 percent of their daily thoughts, actions and decisions, yet Kroll and Sheehan concluded religion plays an important role in people's lives.

By looking at these statistics, it seems that different people interpret "religious" in various ways. By studying the answers of the 20 "Gettin' Deeper" surveys it was found that the majority of people associated religiosity with prayer, belief in God, and/or going to church, which correlates with what previous studies indicate people believe being religious is. From the

information, it can be deducted that varying frequencies of prayer contribute to a person considering him or herself religious. No standard frequency of prayer exists to be considered religious; it is at one's own discretion. Others surveyed revealed that they are religious because they believe in Jesus Christ as God's provision for man's sin. One student has placed her faith in Jesus Christ as atonement for her sins, thereby, having a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus. In contrast to popular belief, she associates religion with rules and rituals while her faith in Jesus Christ is a personal relationship. Another student wrote that she considered herself religious because she keeps "God in mind whenever [she's] doing something," she may represent the few that claim their faith does influences 100 percent of their daily thoughts, actions, and decisions. As demonstrated by these varied ideas of what defines a religious person, many people may not be considered religious by others when they themselves do belief they are.

In the same way, individuals may not consider themselves religious, but by the standards of others they are seen as religious. As demonstrated previously, 90 percent of Protestants and Catholics describe themselves as religious and only 51.4 percent of all other faiths do the same, therefore, one may look at the other to describe a religious person. Religiosity could depend on one's personal definition of the word.

Not surprisingly on a university campus a range of religions professed exist, yet also a dominant religion surfaced among those surveyed. Although only 183 individuals answered question six on the first survey, 87 percent of the 200 claim Christianity as their faith which closely compares to the 1990 poll that found 86.5 percent of Americans professed Christianity. One individual in each of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Mormonism professed these belief systems. Another 11 percent revealed that they adhered to a faith other than those listed above or

Islam. By referring to the results on prayer just discussed, it is reasonable to conclude that not all those who claim Christianity actually live by it on a daily basis.

From the data collected it is easy to see that the way in which the students spend their time does not reflect the way they claim they believe nor the fact that they feel religion should be an influence of daily life. While many students are involved in athletic and/or academic activities or organizations, less than a quarter of those surveyed participate in religious activities or organizations. Again, this contrasts to the 60.5 percent who calls themselves religious and the concept that religion should permeate into one's conduct. It is recognized, however, that it is not necessary to be involved in a religious organization to be religious. Nonetheless, since a majority of those students who completed the "Gettin' Deeper" survey claimed they are religious based on church attendance it is reasonable to deduct that a proportional number would actually participate in some church or campus ministry. Furthermore, although 87 percent claimed Christianity as their faith and church attendance is a popular and beneficial activity for Christians, few attend such services on a consistent basis.

More support of the contrast between the professed religions and daily lives of these students can be obtained from further comments on the "Gettin' Deeper" survey. When asked what they think about when their minds are not engaged in any activity, such as when walking to class or driving, frequent responses were relationships, class work, family, fun, and the future. A small number said they think about God and "what He has given us." This data demonstrates that people truly do not include their faith in the majority of their thoughts and, therefore, in their actions and decisions; yet, 80 percent of the same people indicated they belief religion should influence their lives. If religion is going to be influential in daily life it must be thought about

throughout the day, even in conjunction with other thoughts such as family, future, fun, and relationships. The individuals that pray more than once a day most likely are the same ones that involve their faith in their daily thought life so as to influence their daily actions and decisions. As referenced to in the "Gettin' Deeper" survey, it could be that some of these individuals profess Christianity as their faith simply because they attend a Christian church once a week. Prayer, belief in God, and church attendance does not make an individual a Christian. Rather, these could better fit Webster's definition of religion, which is belief in superhuman being and the expression of that belief in conduct or ritual, possibly prayer and church attendance.

Several reasons were given by surveyed students as to why they believe religion should or should not be a regular part of everyday life. One individual did not believe that religion should be a part one's life because of "the restrictions" he felt religion put on people's lives and another just felt that it's one's individual choice. These "restrictions" probably refer to the rules mentioned previously as an evidence of religion. Of those individuals that felt religion should be a part of one's daily life, many felt that it allows people to deal with people, problems, and decision-making in a positive manner. One student commented that everyone needs something bigger than in which to have faith; this could point to religion and the reason why so many people claim a faith. This comment probably reflects the sentiment of the majority of people, yet from the answers as to how people spend their time, how often they pray, and how much their faith affects their daily thoughts, actions, and decisions, it seems most people have not connected with God.

Finally, questions seven and eight addressed how the students surveyed thought the issue of time in conjunction with responsibility would affect their faith and activities. Correlating with

the study that found that faith progressively increased with age, a majority (88%) believe that the faith they adhere to will increase as they settle down in their careers and/or have a family. From the 20 "Gettin' Deeper" surveys, several reasons were cited for this belief. Many feel that God is important, especially in raising a family; one student even claimed that church "is the right way to start [kids] off." Others felt that their faith will help them with their career, marriage, children, and family life as all of these are challenging aspects of life. One individual stated that more time would be available after college to get deeper into his faith while another claimed that the amount of peer pressure would decrease after settling down, thereby, causing her faith to increase. A majority (75%) of those surveyed also claimed they think their activities will change significantly as they settle down into a career and/or have a family. This percentage should not be surprising, as one grows in his relationship with God, which the majority indicated they would strive to do. However, it should also be noted that the more responsibilities an individual has the more likely he would behave more responsibly. As one has to work longer hours, maintain a good marriage, and raise children, he has less time to spend frivolously, hence, faith is not the sole reason for behavior modification. Several students said they would party and drink less and many said they would be family oriented, thus, their activities would center on them. Some surveyed stated they wanted to get involved in church activities while others believe job related activities would replace their present ones. As can be seen, the majority believes that their faith will increase; this seems to indicate that most of those surveyed realize their current devotion to their faiths is not adequate. The number of those thinking that their activities will change post-graduation may reveal that students know they do not currently practice what they believe.

Conclusion

While it is true the majority of the those surveyed will change both in their level of faith and how they spend their time as they settle down with a family and/or career, faith that is real will not just be a portion of one's life. Rather, faith that is lived out permeates every aspect of life, not merely being something that is practiced once a week, or even once a day. Furthermore, life rarely gets less busy upon graduation from college; with a career and family one can only expect to get busier. Therefore, it is necessary to actually set time aside to take steps to grow in one's faith. Such steps could be studying the Bible, as the majority claimed Christianity as their faith and praying. From studying the answers of the surveys, it seems as if very few people realize that they will have to initiate the growth in their faith. Many feel that with the responsibilities of a job and family, faith will naturally become a larger part of their lives. I do not believe that 87 percent of those surveyed are actually Christians because following the definition of religion, the conduct of such a person should reflect that of Christ. A Christian is someone who has recognized their sinfulness then has personally invited Christ into his/her life, acknowledging Christ's sacrifice on the cross as atonement for his/her sin. When an individual enters such an intimate relationship, he/she will want to spend time with God in prayer and allow God to penetrate daily thoughts, actions, and decisions. Because Christianity is a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, again, it is not likely that the 87 percent which profess Christianity as their faith actually are Christians, but that is between them and God.

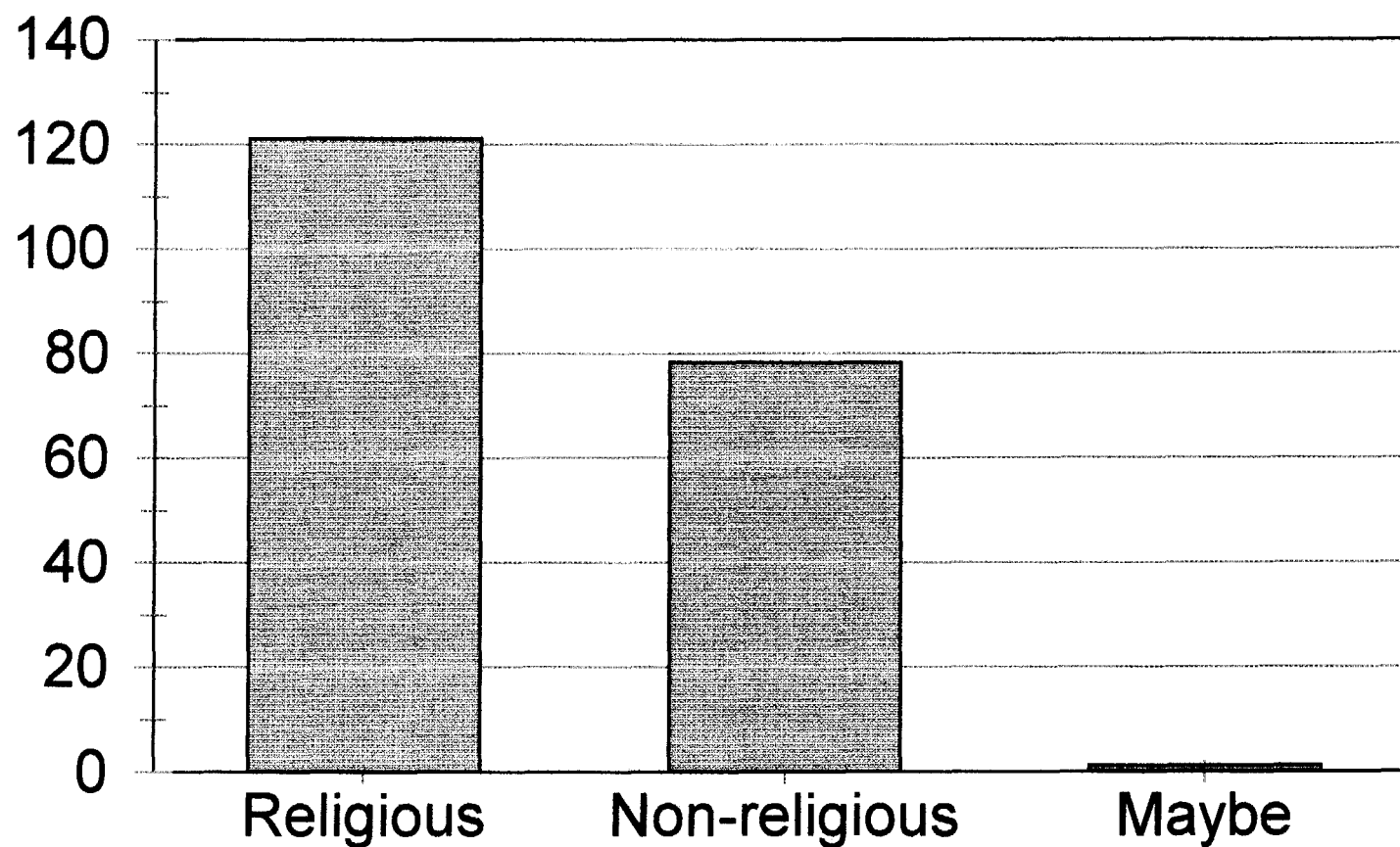
I believe the results of this study reveal that we need to do one of two things. The first option is to define the terms religious and Christian before people participate in such a survey so that the answers to the questions will reflect the accurate meanings of the terms across the broad spectrum of individuals surveyed. Or, secondly, we could redefine the terms so that they

encompass what the majority of Americans acknowledge the meanings to be. As an example, religious could be defined as believing in a supreme being and attending church or synagogue regularly while not adhering to a specific rule of conduct. Reflecting current thought, the term Christian could mean following the accepted norm of appropriate behavior, being raised in a church, or church attendance on a somewhat consistent basis. The current definition of a Christian is taken from the Bible of which I am a student. Biblically, a Christian is someone who has accepted Jesus Christ's death on the cross as the penalty paid for his/her own sins. A Christian realizes that God loves each person and created us to know Him personally, but that man is innately sinful, therefore, we cannot earn our way to heaven; a Christian has personally invited Christ into his/her heart. Nonetheless, it seems that these mid-American college students do have an interest in religion, yet they know little about what it actually is. Perhaps further studies on how they were raised spiritually could reveal the reason why they believe and behave in the ways that they do.

Graphs

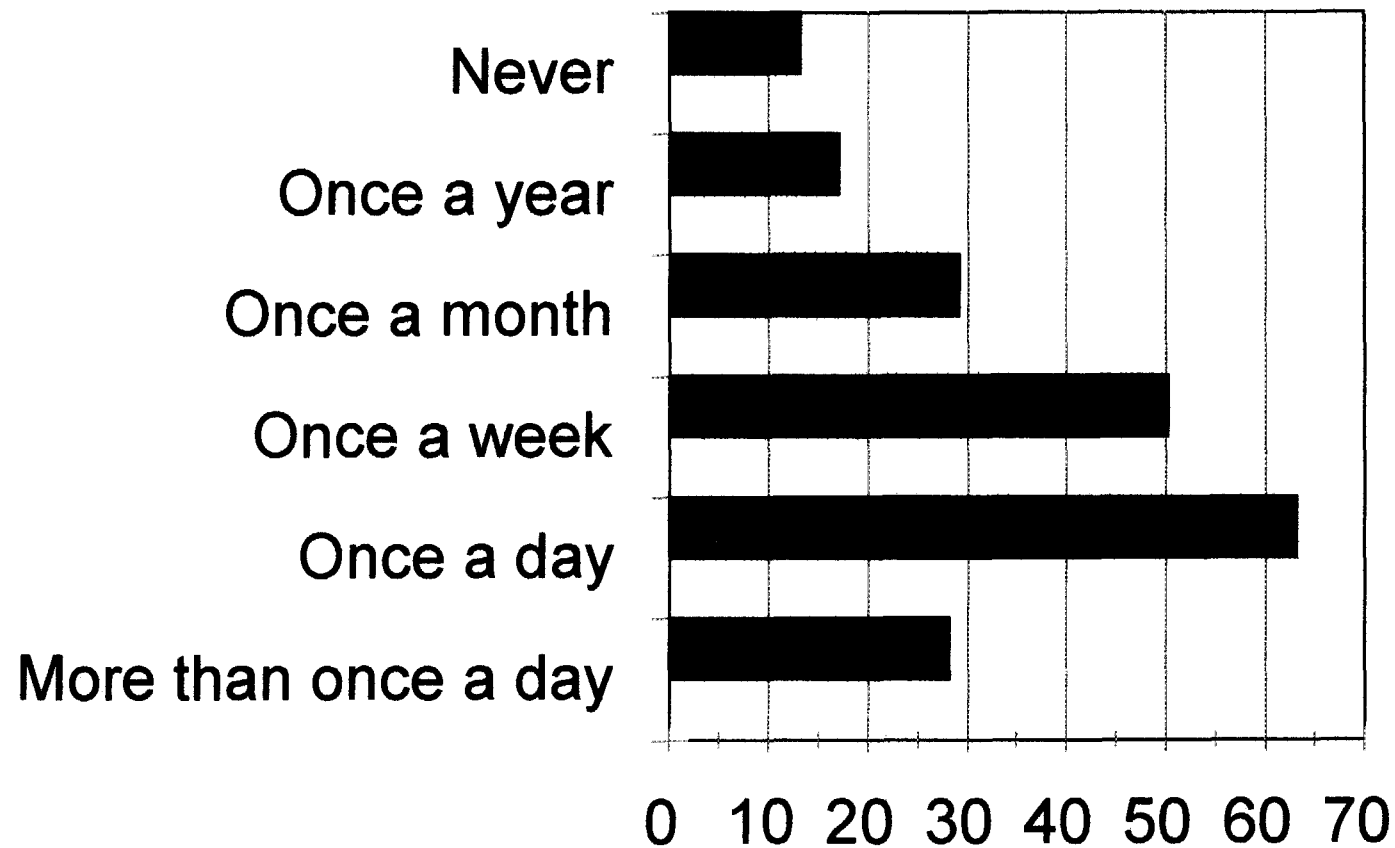
Religious or Not?

What the students said . . .



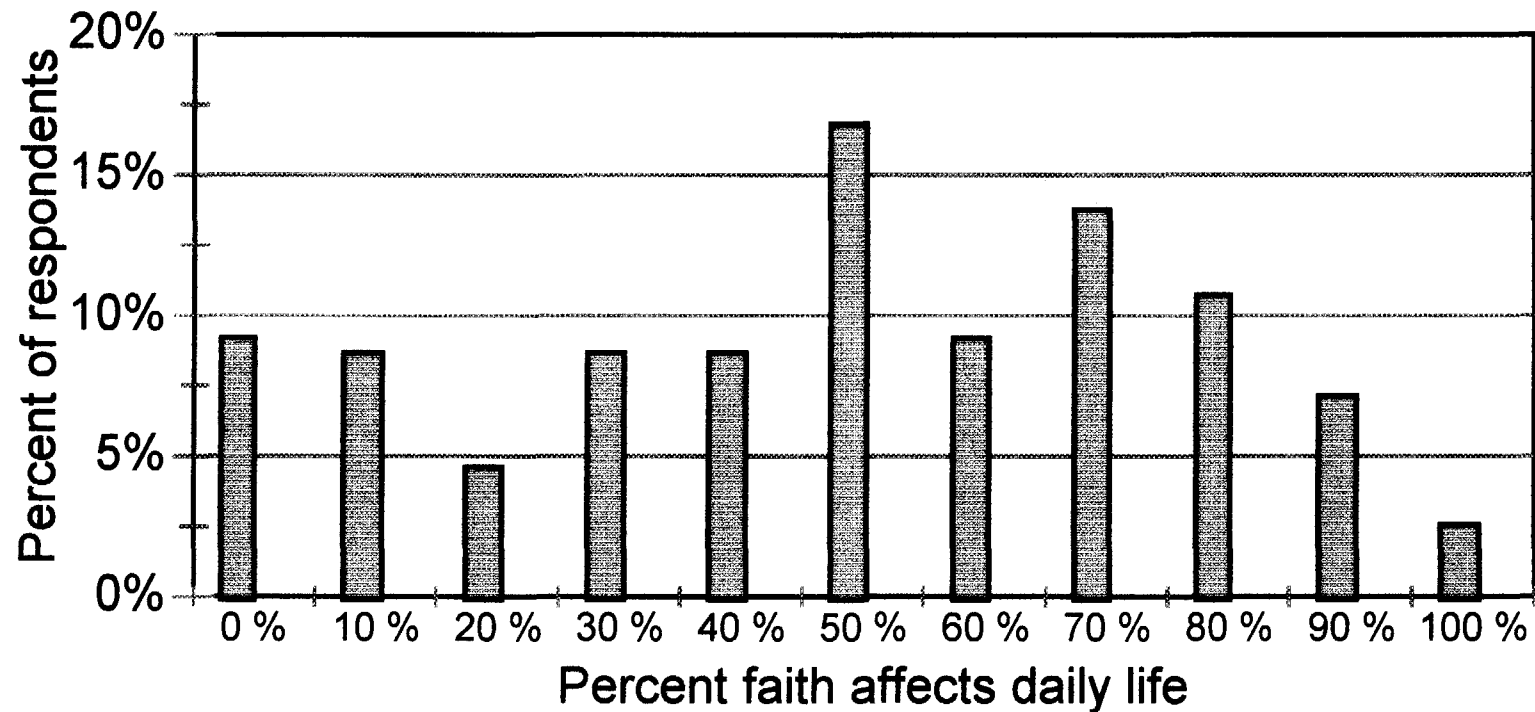
Prayer . . .

How often do they do it?



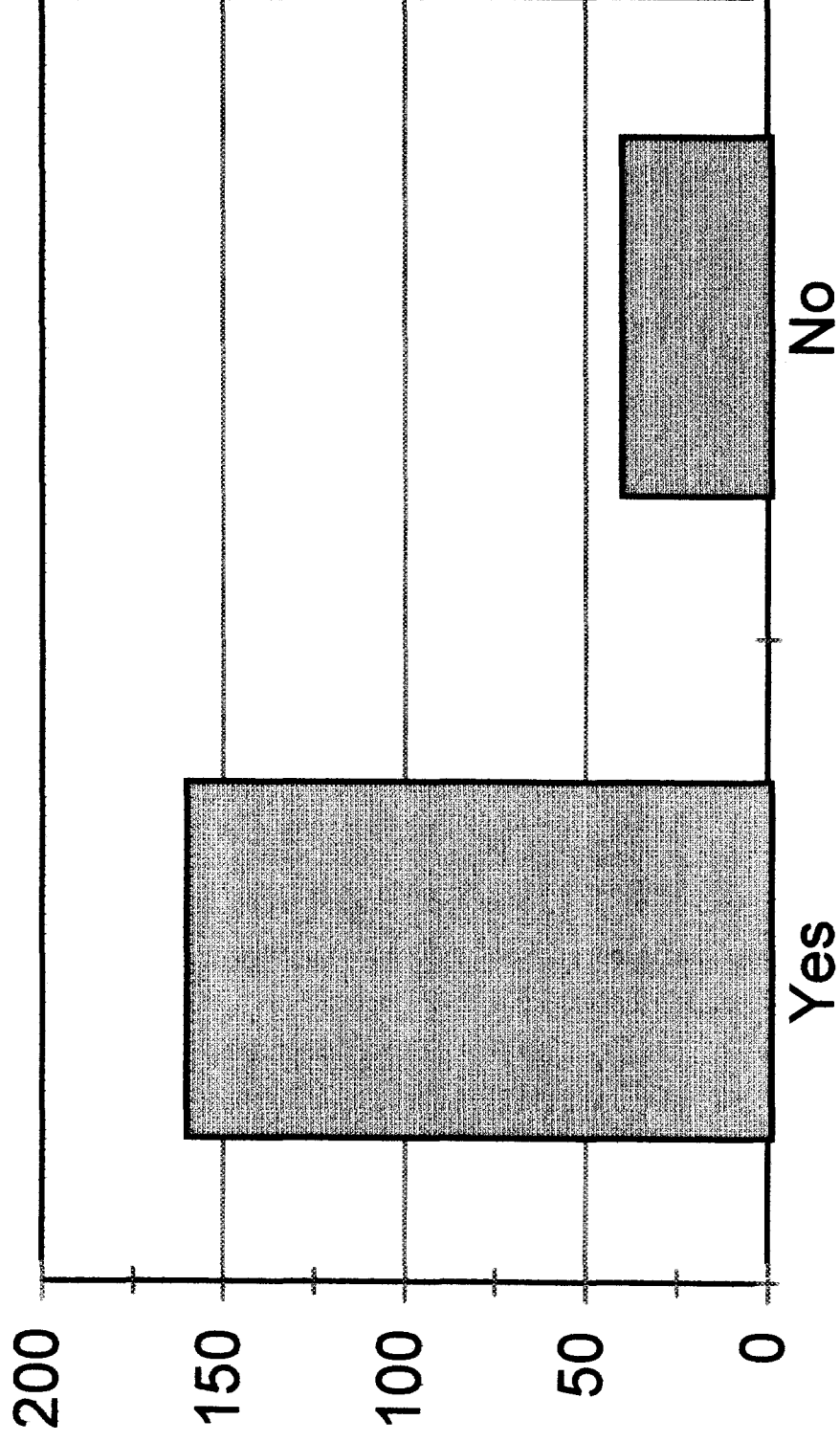
How Much Faith Affects Daily Life

in thoughts, actions, & decisions



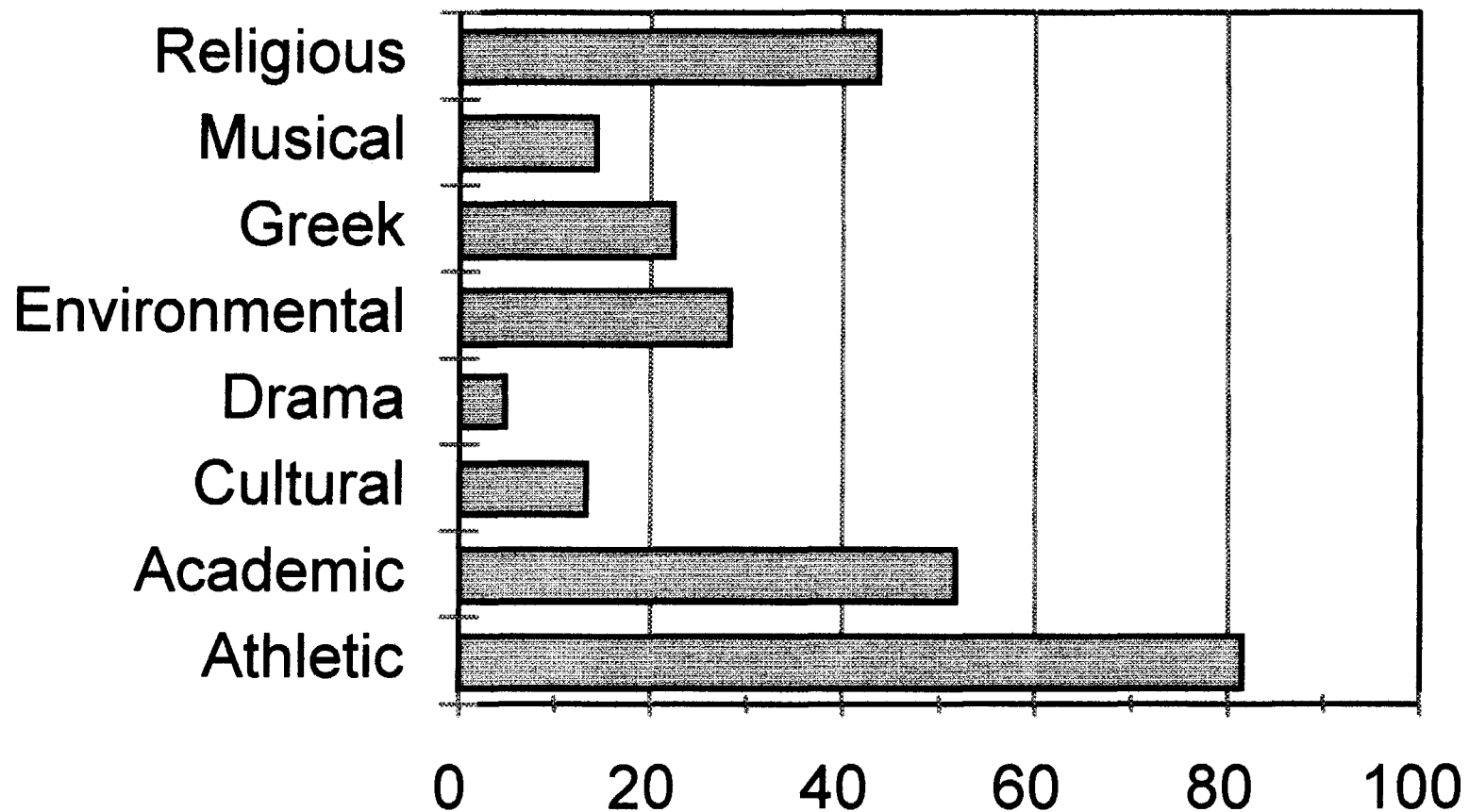
Religion...

Should It Influence Daily Life?



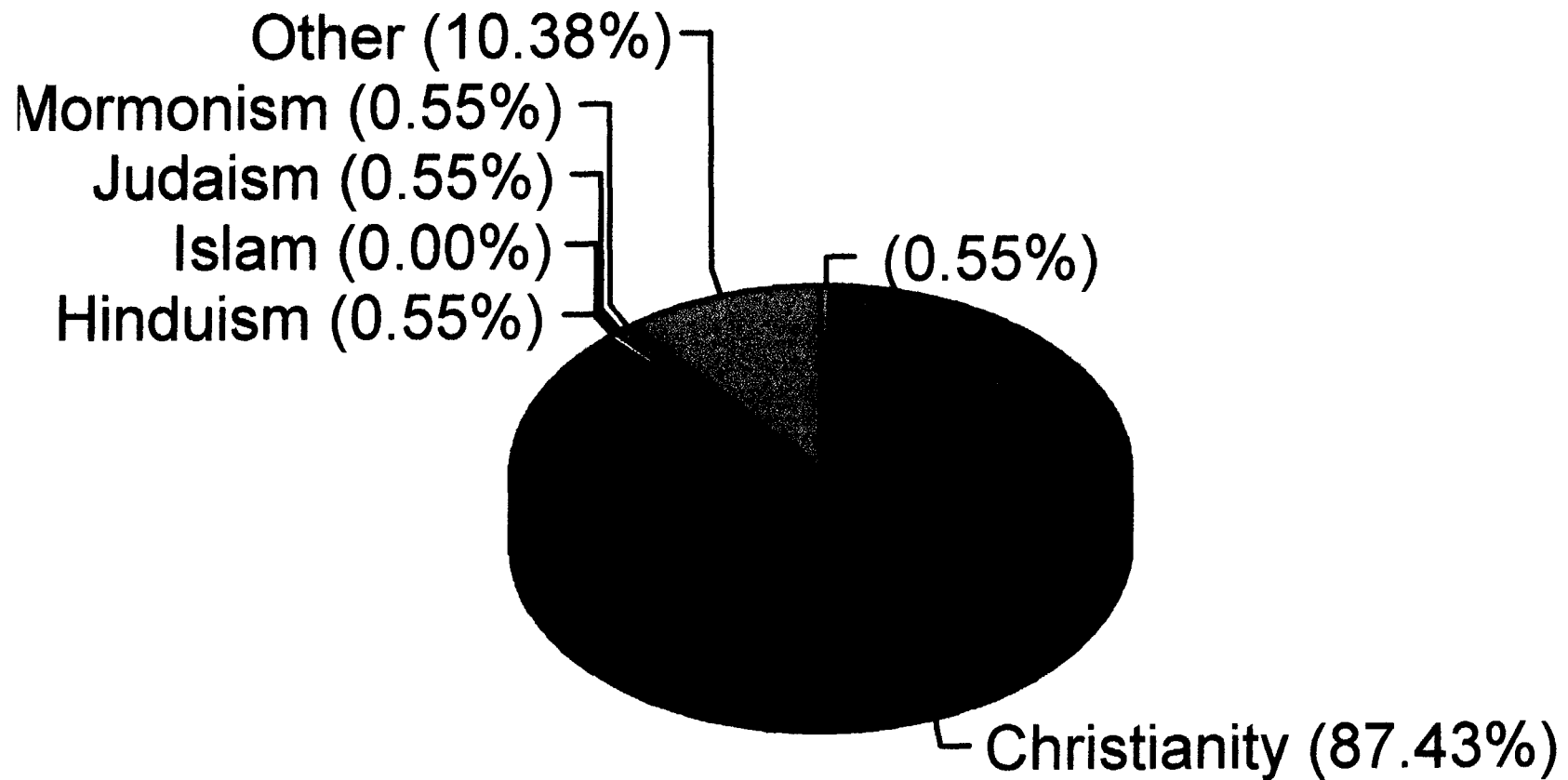
Activities & Organizations

The Students Involvement In



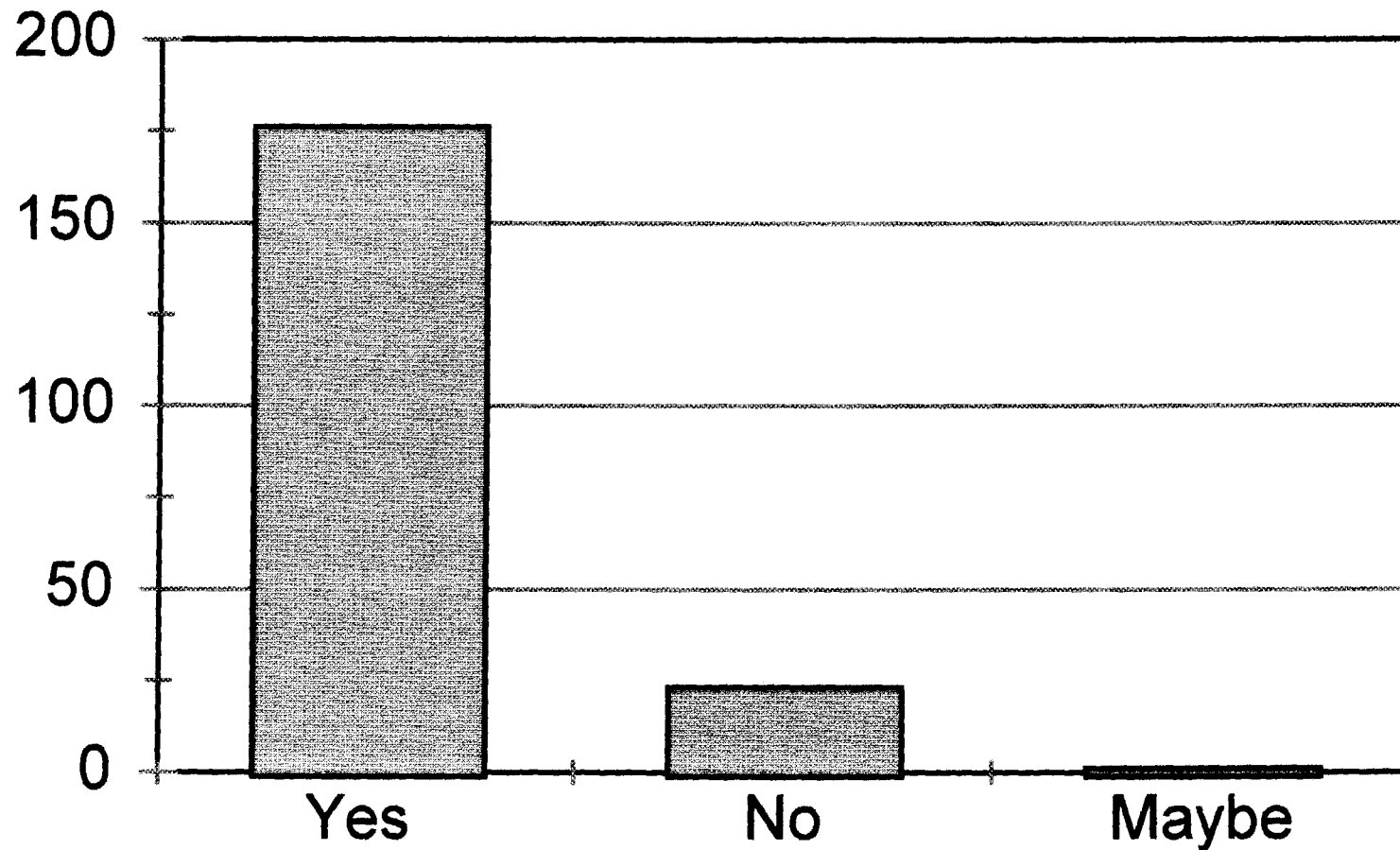
Faiths Claimed

By College Students



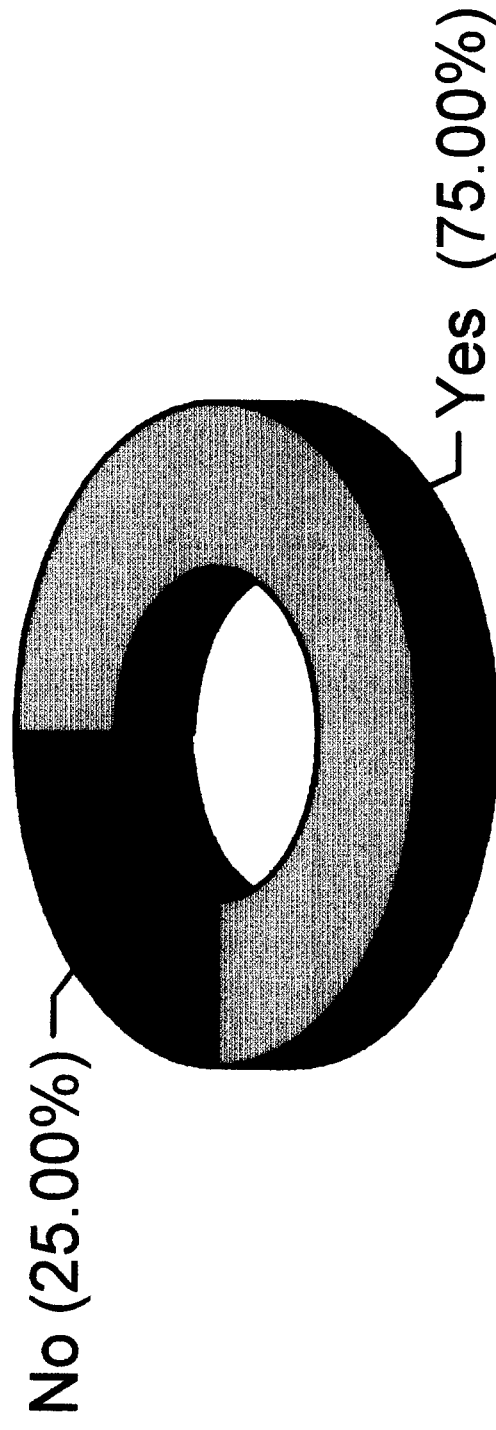
Prospect of Faith Increase

After College Graduation



Change of Activities

After College Graduation



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